TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

«LANGUAGE IDENTITY AND MULTICULTURALISM: A CASE STUDY ON SINGLISH»

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Abstract

In multiracial and multilingual Singapore, a common language is required to make communication possible. Singlish arised as a result of language contact; consisting of elements from the mother tongues (Malay, Mandarin and Tamil) and English. Even though it is very natural for Singaporeans to switch between Singapore Standard English (SSE) and Singlish, there are both pro-Singlish and anti-Singlish proponents. This paper examined the ongoing debate from a sociolinguistic point of view, considering different approaches aiming to explain the relationship between the two varieties as well as the repercussion of the country's language policies. Different surveys on language use and language attitudes were also analysed together with the role of the 'Speak Good English Movement' and the 'Save Our Singlish Campaign'. The general findings are summarized and further evaluated in the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis (known as SWOT analysis), which provides the possibility to anticipate the position of Singlish in the future. Despite the government's perseverance on eradicating the colloquial variety, it continues to be used by a great number of Singaporeans and it is even becoming a language of identity for the younger generation. Erasing a language variety, regarded by many as the core of their Singaporean identity, should be graded as a disgrace. The emergence of Singlish could not have been possible without the socio-political and historical factors that led to it and its large-scale use indicates that it meets Singaporeans' needs. The clash between the two varieties is indeed due to different values: national identity vs. internationalism and economic pragmatism. This paper aims to highlight linguistic diversity as an outcome of linguistic and cultural richness, labelling it as positive and not as a threat. The use of Singlish needs to be embraced along with a high-quality English instruction, which would allow the co-existence of the two varieties and the proper use of both.

Keywords: Singlish, Singapore Standard English, Singapore, multilingualism, language identity, language choice, language attitude, language policy.

Resumen

En un país tan multirracial y multilingüe como lo es Singapur, la comunicación solo es posible gracias a la existencia de un idioma común. El singlish surgió debido al contacto lingüístico; formado por elementos de las lenguas maternas (el malayo, el mandarín, el tamil) y del inglés. A pesar de la naturalidad que supone para los singapurenses usar intermitentemente el inglés estándar de Singapur y el singlish, no solo hay personas a favor de la existencia y uso del singlish, sino también aquellos que están en contra. Este trabajo estudia el continuo debate desde un punto de vista sociolingüístico,

teniendo en cuenta diferentes enfoques que explican la relación entre las dos variedades al igual que la repercusión que han tenido las políticas lingüísticas del país. También han sido analizadas varias encuestas sobre la elección de idioma y actitudes lingüísticas junto con la función del 'Speak Good English Movement' y del 'Save Our Singlish Campaign'. Las conclusiones generales se encuentran resumidas y son analizadas más exhaustivamente en el análisis de Debilidades, Amenazas, Fortalezas y Oportunidades (conocido como análisis DAFO), análisis que nos brinda la posibilidad de prever cuál será la posición del singlish en un futuro. A pesar de la perseverancia por parte del gobierno en erradicar esta variedad coloquial, un gran número de singapurenses continúan utilizándola e incluso ha llegado a convertirse en una lengua que forma parte de la identidad de las jóvenes generaciones. Hacer que una variedad lingüística que para muchos constituye la esencia de la identidad singapurense desaparezca debería calificarse como una desgracia. El singlish surgió como consecuencia de unos factores socio-políticos e históricos y su uso en gran escala indica que satisface las necesidades de los singapurenses. La confrontación entre las dos variedades se da precisamente porque representan valores diferentes: identidad nacional vs. internacionalismo y pragmatismo económico. Este trabajo aspira resaltar que la diversidad lingüística es fruto de la riqueza lingüística y cultural, calificándolo como algo positivo en vez de como a una amenaza. El uso del singlish debería ser aceptado además de una educación del inglés de alta calidad, lo cual permitiría la coexistencia de las dos variedades y el uso apropiado de ambos.

Palabras clave: singlish, inglés estándar de Singapur, Singapur, multilingüismo, identidad lingüística, elección de idioma, actitud lingüística, política lingüística.

1. Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in any culture and therefore, in any country since it is the core of nationalism as well as ethnicity. It does not only represent a nation's identity, but it also determines our sense of ourselves and, needless to say, it serves as uniting force by constituting a basic cultural and social bond. Due to globalization, multiculturalism has become the *new normal* nowadays even though other factors, such as colonialism, are also linked to its growing process. One should not confuse multiculturalism and multilingualism while it is undeniable they often show a close relationship. Because of multilingualism, the need of a language to serve as the medium of communication is quite common which is what the role of English in global terms is today. English has become the world's lingua franca which has led to the emergence of Global Englishes, or in other words, the diversification of English which means there is not only one form of such language but different varieties (Jenkins, 2015; Benet-Martínez, Hong, 2014).

Singapore is a small and young island country that represents an extremely complex picture of languages in contact, not only for the individual but for the society in its entirety. According to the 2010 census, the number of actual Singapore residents is 3.7 million and such population is comprised of four main races: the Chinese (74.1 %), the Malays (13.4 %), the Indians (9.2%) and Others (3.3%). This multi-racial and multilingual nation has four recognized official languages which are Chinese, Malay, Tamil and English. English was introduced in the island due to the British colonization, only being spoken by the elite but ever since independence, an English-centric language policy has been implemented on account of the government's interest in making the country active in the world's economy (Zhiming, 2011; Tan, 2017). From then on, English learning has spread quite significantly, so much as to become the mother tongue of a large proportion of the population, as table 1 shows.

Such a characteristic case of language contact ended in the emergence of two English varieties: Singapore Standard English (SSE) and Singapore Colloquial English (SCE or Singlish). It is the latter, which I will refer to as Singlish, in which this paper will focus on as to not only understand the differences between both varieties, but also their relationship. As a matter of fact, it is the aim of this paper to show the reality regarding language attitudes in Singapore and to prove how the knowledge as well as the use of Singlish can be further beneficial than eradicating it. In order to do so, it is important to analyse some previously

proposed models that aim to explain the relationship between SSE and Singlish. Likewise, Singapore's language policy should not be ignored since it is a vital issue regarding the language development of the country as well as different surveys that help make sense of what the situation really is and how Singaporeans feel about their language identity.

Table 1. Language Most Frequently Spoken at Home, in percentage (Aged 5 years & over)

	Total		Chinese		Malays		Indians		Others	
	200	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010	2000	2010
English	23.0	32.3	23.9	32.6	7.9	17.0	35.6	41.6	68.5	62.4
Mandarin	35.0	35.6	45.1	47.7	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	4.4	3.8
Dialects*	23.8	14.3	30.7	19.2	0.1	-	0.1	-	3.2	0.9
Malay	14.1	12.2	0.2	0.2	91.6	82.7	11.6	7.9	15.6	4.3
Tamil	3.2	3.3	-	-	0.1	0.1	42.9	36.7	0.2	0.1
Others	0.9	2.3	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.2	9.7	13.6	8.2	28.6

(Singapore Census of Population 2010 Statistical Release 1, Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion.)

*Chinese dialects

Singlish is commonly known as the oral, colloquial variety of Standard Singapore English. It has its own pattern of intonation, integrates loanwords from Malay and various Chinese dialects and borrows grammatical structures from theses languages as well as from English (Bokhorst-Heng, 2005). In short, SSE resembles British English whereas Singlish differs significantly in both grammar and vocabulary from the standard variety. The distinction between the two terms is not only recognized by linguists but also by Singaporeans. This means that a fluent speaker of English, who has not had any contact with Singlish before, will most likely have some trouble trying to understand it completely or will consider such utterances wrong. Here are some examples as to see how distinguishing this variety is:

-Singlish: Flower where got pretty?

-Standard English: Are you certain that the flower is pretty?

-Hokkien: Huay dolo u swee (Flower where have pretty).

-Singlish: She got say.

-Standard English: She did say.

- Mandarin: **她 有** 说 (She do say).

(Ang, Kwek, Quian, Ng, 2012: 6)

-Singlish: Wah, damn hungry, anything to makan a not? I dying already.

-Standard English: I am so hungry. Is there anything to eat? I'm starving here.

-Makan: Malay term referring to "meal" or "to eat".

(VJ Times, 2000: 13; Talkingcok.com, 202: 71 cited in Harada, 2009: 71)

As Jennifer Jenkins (2015) notes, there are different approaches aiming to explain the relationship between Singlish and SSE, which will be discussed hereunder. Although there is no clear agreement between linguists as to explain such occurrence, an increasing number of Singaporeans, young people in particular, are able to switch between the two varieties effortlessly.

2. Literature review: State of the art

With the aim of preventing possible confusion henceforth, it is vital to clarify that in the same way that there are different approaches regarding the sociolinguistic situation in Singapore, linguists as well as citizens employ different terms when discussing the issue. At times, such distinction is deliberately and meaningfully marked as to signal divergence. In other cases, it is merely a matter of common use and generalization. A great number of linguists consider it more appropriate to use the terms Singapore Colloquial English (SCE) or Colloquial Singapore English (CSE) than Singlish for there are those who take the view that the latter carries negative connotations, being the same as saying 'bad English' (Fong, Lim, Wee, 2002). Conversely, Alsagoff (2007) introduces the terms International Singapore English (ISE) when alluding to SSE and Local Singapore English (LSE) for Singlish. For the sake of convenience and clarity, the two varieties of English in Singapore will be referred to as SSE and Singlish through the whole of this paper. Nevertheless, it is not without reason that those

terms are the ones being used. The principal aim of this work is to break away from the negative conceptions of Singlish in any form and contribute to it gaining linguistic prestige and recognition. Furthermore, it is this term the one most commonly used by Singaporeans themselves.

Different approaches seeking to explain the relationship between SSE and Singlish have been presented over the years: the Lectal Continuum, the Diglossia Approach, Expanding Triangles and the Cultural Orientation Model, which will be briefly outlined next.

2.1. The Lectal Continuum

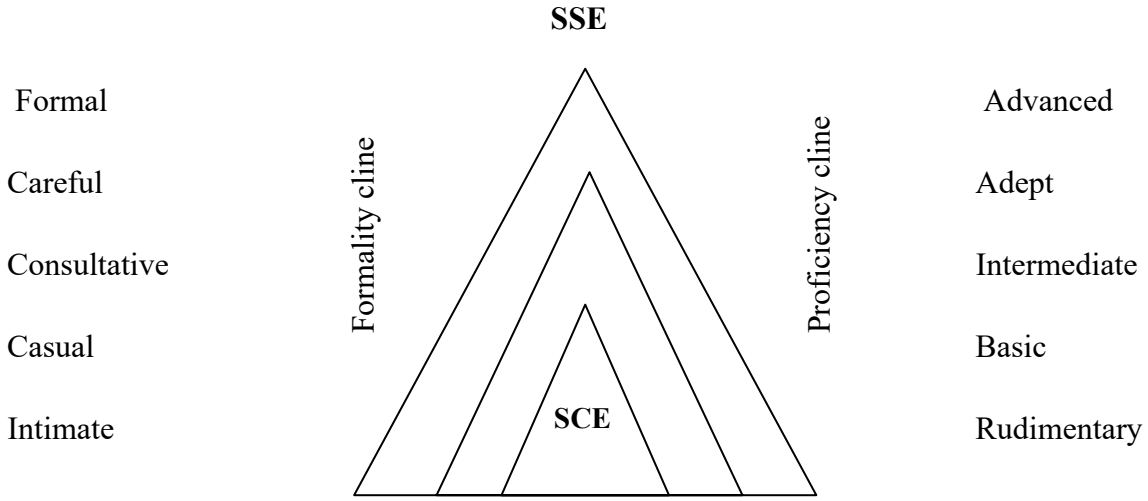
Platt and Weber (1980) did not consider that Singapore's English varieties were based on errors and thus, they developed The Lectal Continuum. This framework describes the variation of Singapore English along a cline, moving up and down depending on their proficiency, education and socio-economic status. On that basis, Singapore English consists of three sociolects: acrolect, mesolect and basilect. The acrolectal variety (idealized Standard British English, in this case: SSE) would be at one end, associated with the social group with higher education as well as socio-economic status while the basilectal variety (Singlish) is associated with low education, low socio-economic status and lower English proficiency (Platt, 1975; Platt and Weber, 1980).

As Alsagoff (2007) remarks, this model sees the variation in Singapore English as a matter of access and opportunity or lack of it and hence, not one of choice. Such affirmation positions Singlish as undesirable, a non-native variety form consisting of interlanguage errors (mother tongue interference, overgeneralization…) and SSE as the desired variety.

2.2. Expanding Triangles

Pakir (1991) explains the variation of English in Singapore with a model of expanding triangles in which there are two clines: proficiency and formality. According to this, the most proficient speakers have the greatest range of styles, hence the largest triangle while the less educated speakers have a smaller range of possibilities which is represented in the following figure:

Figure 1. Expanding triangles of English



(Pakir, 1991: 174).

Pakir asserts that the "near-universal use of English in Singapore today, in addition to other languages, has produced a population that knows English but with varying proficiency levels" (1991: 174). What this model remarks is that, simply put, an educated speaker will be able to portray different styles from SSE to Singlish depending on the context, but a rudimentary speaker will not have access to such repertoire and will be limited to participate in certain contexts.

2.3. The Diglossia Approach

The Diglossia Approach became the dominant framework since it is now more commonly used than the Lectal Continuum for the analysis of Singapore English. One of the main reasons is that Platt and his associates treated Singlish as a non-native variety, yet an important amount of Singaporean children have had English as a native language for many years (Gupta, 1994).

This approach denotes Singlish as the L-form ('Low') and SSE as the H-form ('High'). The H-variety is meant to be used in formal contexts, education as well as in any writing form. On the other hand, the L-variety is used in informal and social contexts for the purpose of attaining some degree of friendliness or solidarity (Gupta, 1994; Gupta, 1998). Code-switching takes place then underlying meaning, not because of lack of competence but

because it has a sociolinguistic aim. Therefore, Singlish is no longer linked exclusively to uneducated speakers nor it is the undesired variety.

2.4. The Cultural Orientation Model (COM)

Even though the different approaches have gradually become more consistent, none of them deal with the question of why speakers choose to mark their speech as Singlish. Alsagoff (2007) proposed a framework that describes the variation of Singapore English with regard to cultural orientations, English serving both as a global language as well as an inter-ethnic lingua franca. Language variation is then seen in terms of a negotiation between "being global" and "being local" which perfectly portrays Singaporean macro-cultural perspectives and identity.

On the one hand, English has a high status in Singapore due to its major role in the world market. In order to maintain international relationships and be competitive in global terms, there is the need of SSE to be used. In spite of this globalised perspective, the Singapore government succeeds disassociating English from culture and ethnicity. English remains "cultureless" as to avoid being corrupted by Western values, thus being understood as a global language that does not belong to any culture in particular while the other official languages of the country (Chinese, Malay and Tamil) carry their culture and identity (Alsagoff, 2007; Alsagoff & Ho, 1998; Wee, 2003).

On the other hand, English serves as the ideal lingua franca in multilingual Singapore for the sake of efficient communication. Although the government aims to alienate English from culture, it has noticeably been altered by being in contact with the languages and cultures that make Singapore distinctive. Alsagoff (2007: 37) argues that the emergence of such difference, in this case Singlish, is "explained by looking language embracing new cultures" since "as English is used by people, so it becomes shaped by this use and by its users, and becomes part of the cultural history of Singapore—and it, in turn, shapes the culture which it serves.". In consequence, Singlish has drifted apart from the standard variety (SSE) and it represents the identity of Singapore (Pakir, 1991; Rubdy, 2001).

In summary, the Cultural Orientation Model, in which this paper relies on, asserts that the variation of Singapore English is based on a negotiation between two opposing macro-cultural orientations: a globalist perspective (use of SSE) and a localist one (use of Singlish).

Variation is then a matter of choice and it is determined by the formality of the situation, the desire to bond and embrace the local identity as well as a matter of proficiency, considering that a proficient speaker of English will most probably have a wider macro-cultural repertoire. Each variety is associated with some meaningful functionalities that depict particular socio-cultural values and practices as the table below shows [see table 2].

In Alsagoff's model (2007: 40), the varieties are not defined as polar opposites, but that they can be combined for the purpose of "marking the speaker as 'local', as an insider, stressing the importance of community membership alongside educational attainment or authoritarian power." Such complexity in speech situations could not be accounted for by the diglossic model. English in Singapore serves as a "lingua-cultural resource" (Agar, 1994 cited in Alsagoff, 2007: 40) for style-shifting, which means that the speakers of Singapore English have at their disposal a number of linguistic features for when they wish to identify or mark a change in cultural orientation or style. Singlish offers then the possibility for speakers to say and express something in different ways which lead to the emergence of the term *structural inclusivity* also coined by the author of the COM. The term refers to the language's great grammatical diversity, one that is disclosed variously. For one thing, it has the ability to represent different ethnic voices; the use of *meh* or *ma* indicating a Chinese speaker or *lah*, exceeding ethnic groups. Singlish speakers have thus the opportunity to increase or decrease the degree of ethnic marking at their convenience, preference or necessity. This inclusivity bridges educational differences as well since the speaker "may vary his way of speaking depending on the perceived educational or proficiency level of his interlocutor" (2007: 41), ability that should not be mistaken with corrupted English.

Table 2. Features of the two orientations in the Cultural Orientation Model.

	ISE *Globalism*	**LSE** *Localism*
a	Economic capital	Socio-cultural capital
b	Authority	Camaraderie
c	Formality	Informality
d	Distance	Closeness
e	Educational attainment	Community membership

(Alsagoff 2007: 39)

3. Singapore Standard English and Singapore Colloquial English

Language policies, language use and language attitudes in multilingual Singapore have encouraged an undeniable rising status of English. As stated above, there are two varieties of English: Singapore Standard English and Singapore Colloquial English (Singlish). The issue regarding Singlish is that part of the population, including the ruling government, accounts it as broken English, thus they are against its use and seek its abolishment. The main argument of anti-Singlish advocates is how it is an impediment in the acquisition of 'good English' which is a threat to the nation's position in the global market. Nevertheless, not everyone sees it in that way. Pro-Singlish advocates reckon that the variety reflects one's identity and communal membership and that Singlish users are perfectly able to switch between the two varieties. Therefore, it would not adversely affect the standard variety. In the same way, no full agreement has been reached in the use of it in the educational context since some teachers note it could definitely be a useful tool while others believe it would set a bad example for their students (Chye, 2010; Rubdy, 2007).

The main challenge concerning this issue is how multi-faced Singlish is due to it lacking a concrete definition. Evidently, where there is discrepancy in such a basic step, one can expect a debate with no resolution. If there is no agreement when discussing the subject itself, neither can there be discussing its usage, purpose or potential. The ongoing conversation upon Singlish versus SSE is not only confined within the classroom walls or the government buildings, it is a topic of conversation in everyday Singapore and it has even spread to the media.

3.1. Language policy

In the interest of understanding multilingual Singapore and the status of Singlish, one needs to have some knowledge about the country's language planning and policy. After independence, English became one of the official languages of the country because of, as has already been introduced, its importance regarding economic development. In the last decades, English has changed from being a foreign language to becoming the dominant working language, even being the medium of instruction in schools. In fact, not only is it the major language of administration and commerce, but also in education so much that English proficiency is decisive when accepting students for certain careers. Such privilege has an

unquestionable impact on the relationships between English and the other languages of Singapore (Chua, 2007).

As Roy (1994) states, Singapore's government holds "a 'soft authoritarian' approach in governing the country" (cited in Chua, 2007), meaning that there is strict monitoring over decision making, which focuses on preserving political stability and economic prosperity. One of the main tools is using literacy, more precisely English literacy, as an economic resource. The country's literacy development over the years cannot be understood without taking account of the language policies implemented by the government. Shortly after independence, a mandatory bilingual policy was put into effect (1966) for which students are meant to be proficient in English and one other mother tongue. However, even though English is learned as the first language (L1) while Mandarin, Malay or Tamil as the second language (L2), the latter are the ones officially designated mother tongues of the Chinese, Malay and Indian communities. As a matter of fact, it is the ethnic group of an individual's father what determines her or his mother tongue, no matter which language has been spoken in early childhood. What this means is that the four languages share an equal official status, but they have distinct roles: English being the working language and lingua franca while the mother tongues being the embodiment of culture (Ng, 2011; Chua, 2007). Such distinction makes this concept of bilingualism specific to Singapore showing the marked objectives of the different languages as the then Minister for Education, Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam stated in 1986:

> Our policy of bilingualism that each child should learn English and his mother tongue, I regard as a fundamental feature of our education system… Children must learn English so that they will have a window to the knowledge, technology and expertise of the modern world. They must know their mother tongues to enable them to know what makes us what we are.
>
> (cited in Rappa & Wee, 2006: 84)

Without doubt, this bilingual policy carries its complications. Being literate in two languages is always challenging but it becomes more notably when the student's linguistic background as well as their exposure to the languages in school is unequal as it is the case in Singapore. There are homes where English is spoken by school children giving them more opportunities for practicing. On the other hand, there are Chinese Singaporeans who are forced to learn Mandarin as their mother tongue when they are native speakers of a Chinese dialect which is an additional complication when mastering their languages. Another very influential factor to

keep in mind is how all the subjects in school are taught in English except for the mother tongue classes. The complexity of the language issue in Singapore is comprehensibly unquestionable. It therefore comes as no surprise how the *Goh Report* (*Report on the Ministry of Education 1978*) concluded in the failing of the bilingual policy as the main problem of the education system; there was "high education wastage, low levels of literacy and ineffective bilingualism" ("New Education System", n.d.). Achieving proficiency in two, some cases three languages was too demanding and affected students' competence and performance. The Goh Report proposed solutions that resulted in the New Education System (NES) that allocated learners in "different courses at the upper primary and secondary levels depending on their language proficiencies and academic abilities at Primary 3 and 6 respectively." ("New Education System", n.d.). The major concern of the government is to preserve Standard English literacy at all costs plus some proficiency in one of the mother tongues. Language planning in Singapore, put in just a few words, is a clear case example of language prestige. Mandarin is favoured among the different Chinese dialects spoken in the country which was reflected in the government's 'Speak Mandarin Campaign', one that share many similarities with the current 'Speak Good English Movement'. The intention behind both campaigns is to impose one language, privileging them over others. They are solid proof of the importance and influence of language planning in Singapore (Ng, 2011; Chua, 2007).

3.2. Language choice and language attitudes

Language choice and language attitudes in Singapore are highly determined by political, economic and social factors. Singlish is used daily by most Singaporeans either as an inter-ethnic lingua franca or as a language identity marker. Anyhow, the Singapore government takes a stand against its use and it has succeeded attributing it negative connotations, especially since the 'Speak Good English Movement' came into existence as a response to the Singlish 'crisis'. The country is filled with Singlish users and supporters while at the same time there are those who are users and still somehow agree with the government's position. On the other hand, there is also a part of the population which opposes it completely and considers it a disgrace. There is no doubt that it is the government's voice the one that dominates the debate. However, several surveys (Rubdy, 2007; Leimgruber, 2014; Harada, 2009) have been conducted with the passing of the years as to know and understand the citizens' stance regarding this matter. In the same way, the public voice is depicted in the

mass daily press too. Actually, the press, particularly *The Straits Times*, serves the public voice (the citizens), the expert voice (academics and linguists) and the political voice (government leaders) as a means to express their opinion and to defend their case (Bokhorst-Heng: 2005).

The prevailing focus of those who advocate the existence and use of Singlish is that it entails national identity and unity; it is unique, their own. It serves as a national bond in a country divided by their mother tongues, with English as a lingua franca but still foreign. Not only does it act as a common form of communication, but it also helps breaking class and educational level barriers, establishing group affinity. Singlish must then be recognized linguistic legitimacy, not being broken English but a variety with its own linguistic structure; a rich and complex language that serves the daily needs of certain speakers well. Furthermore, pro-Singlish advocates defend its coexistence with SSE and their ability to code-switch between the two varieties. It is not a matter of superimposing one over the other but to acknowledge both as well as their different intended use (Bokhorst-Heng: 2005; Hoon: 2003; Ng, Cavallaro, Koh: 2014).

Anti-Singlish advocates, on the other hand, worry that the popularization and 'over-use' of Singlish would aggravate speakers' competence in SSE. They assert that students would not be able to distinguish the two varieties; ergo they would use them incorrectly both in inadequate situations as well as confusing their form. But still, without a doubt, English's economic utility is the core of their argument. Singlish is seen as a direct threat to Singapore's role in the world economy. Closely related to this, some believe that achieving proficiency in the standard variety is the way to ensure socio-economic mobility since those who are capable speakers of English are the ones who will have the best chances work wise. In line with this position, the ability to speak SSE should not only be taken with pride but should be characteristic of the Singaporean identity (Bokhorst-Heng: 2005; Wee: 2010; Ng, Cavallaro, Koh: 2014).

In brief, the different attitudes towards Singlish are based on different needs and purposes. So that Singaporeans' voices are fully depicted, political and social campaigns need to be addressed just as some already conducted surveys and online publications.

3.2.1. The ‘Speak Good English Movement’ vs. the ‘Save Our Singlish Campaign’

The ‘Speak Good English Movement’ (SGEM) was launched in 2000 to erase Singlish from Singapore. The campaign’s goal is to encourage the use of grammatically correct English that is understood globally. A year’s goal is set up annually and since 2008, the Inspiring Teacher of English Award has been given to passionate and prosperous English teachers. Here is how the SGEM defines the movement in their official website:

> The role of the Speak Good English Movement is to encourage Singaporeans to speak and write in Standard English and help those who habitually use fractured, ungrammatical English to use grammatical English. It is important to understand the differences in Standard English, broken English and Singlish. The Speak Good English Movement recognizes the existence of Singlish as a cultural marker for many Singaporeans. We aim to help those who speak only Singlish, and those who think Singlish is English, to speak Standard English. To achieve all this, we wish to create an environment of good English in Singapore.
>
> (The Speak Good English Movement, n.d.)

As can be noted from the previously quote, they make a difference between broken English and Singlish, recognizing Singlish has some kind of status. Still, such statement is not really in accordance with the work they carry out or with other statements from the movement itself as well as from government personnel. An example of this is the following fragment from the speech by at the time Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at the launch of the SGEM:

> If we speak a corrupted form of English that is not understood by others, we will lose a key competitive advantage. My concern is that if we continue to speak Singlish, it will over time become Singapore’s common language. Poor English reflects badly on us and make us seem less intelligent or competent. (…) [Younger Singaporeans] should not take the attitude that Singlish is cool or feel that speaking Singlish makes them more “Singaporean”. They have a responsibility to create a conductive environment for the speaking of good English. If they speak good English, others will follow suit. If they speak Singlish when they can speak good English, they are doing a disservice to Singapore.
>
> (Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, 2000)

Likewise, the stance of the current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong is fairly similar, as it was reflected in his press secretary words when corresponding a New York Times opinion piece, in which she argued that:

> The Government has a serious reason for this policy [promoting the mastery of standard English]. Standard English is vital for Singaporeans to earn a living and be understood not just by other Singaporeans but also English speakers everywhere. (…) Using Singlish will make it harder for Singaporeans to learn and use standard English.
>
> (Au-Yong, 2016)

In spite of the consistency of the SGEM which continues to be very much active still today, the movement could be considered to be a fiasco since they have failed to achieve much progress regarding the use of Singlish. Nevertheless, the previously launched linguistic campaign convened by the government, the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' (SMC) shares many similarities with the SGEM, both in its reasoning as well as in the structure followed. The SMC (1979) has been much more successful over the years than the current one. Yet they both serve as an example to understand how campaigns in Singapore follow a characteristic pattern, as Bokhorst-Heng (2005: 196-197) portrayed in the following way: "the government's representation is presented as valid → something is identified as threatening that ideal image → and thus a national crisis is identified → the villain is identified → the government's solution to rid that villain is represented → the ideal representation of the nation is validated and restored". In the case of the SMC, Chinese dialects are perceived as the reason why the bilingual policy is a failure. Therefore, the government responds eliminating the use of Chinese dialects in Singapore by imposing Mandarin. The use of Chinese dialects is considered a handicap to the acquisition of proficiency in Standard English, in the same way that the use of Singlish is. Hence, the government seeks for the disappearance of both 'threats'. Even though the SGEM is called a movement instead of a campaign for what appears to be an attempt to making it people-driven and going beyond politics, it fails to take notice of the relationship between language and identity which is the reason why the SGEM will continue to have trouble forging ahead (Bokhorst-Heng, 1999).

The main force of counterattack against the SGEM is the 'Save Our Singlish Campaign'. The campaign was launched in 2002 by TalkingCock.com, a satirical humour website whose authors "believe in freedom of expression and celebrating the uniqueness of Singaporeans" (Big Cock, 2003). The goal of this campaign, as its name indicates, is to preserve the use of

Singlish and to protect it from those who are only worried about the economic progress of the country. They are not against speaking good English, but instead they opt for the co-existence of both and for honouring language diversity. The sense of the campaign was perfectly portrayed in the speech Colin Goh gave as to introduce their cause:

> We are NOT anti-English. We completely support the speaking and writing of good English. We actually hope that the Speak Good English Movement will see us as complementary, and not adversarial. (…) Why we're fighting for Singlish, is because it's simply a part of our culture. In fact, it may be the ONLY thing that makes us uniquely Singaporean. It mixes all the various languages, which to me, seems to spread multi-cultural understanding. (…) We're not asking you to switch to teaching Singlish in school as a subject. We're just saying, don't try to wipe out our culture by preventing it from being depicted on TV or radio. Don't be afraid of it. (…) And I am confident that we know when to speak Singlish, and when we should use proper English. [If we fail doing so], it's not because Singlish exists, but that we may not have been taught enough proper English. (…) if we don't understand this primal need to give voice to ourselves as we really are, then we will never achieve cultural confidence. The connection between Singlish and the Singaporean identity is very important.
>
> (Goh, 2002 quoted in Supreme Cock, 2002)

3.2.2. Singaporean speakers' evaluations

Different surveys have been conducted over the years seeking to throw light on the speakers' perceptions regarding the relationship and choice between Singlish and SSE, the way they define them, and their attitudes apropos the language policies that have shaped the linguistic ecology of Singapore. This paper will take into consideration the ones carried out by Rudby (2007) and Leimgruber (2014).

Rudby (2007) worked with the findings of 690 students (523 Chinese, 121 Malay and 56 Indian) from 19 primary schools that participated in a survey questionnaire. The results reveal that students are aware of a domain separation in the use of Singlish and SSE. As the following table shows, young Singaporeans do use Singlish on a daily basis: 55% of the students do so during class (S1) while 83% use it with friends during recess (S2); 65% feel comfortable using it when speaking to friends (S4); and 71% of them even affirm that it is easier this way than using another language (S5). However, 83% of the respondents do not

think it is cool to speak Singlish (S8). Such finding points out how despite of the active and increasing use of Singlish, it is not attached to a positive value. English, on the other hand, is indeed recognized as favorable with 95% disagreeing on the fact that speaking good English would convey mockery (S9) and 92% noticing the importance of speaking good English (S10). Even more so considering how 69% consider that they do not need Singlish to put across their ideas clearly (S3).

Table 3. Student patterns of use and beliefs about the use of Singlish

Statements	*Agree** (%)	*Disagree*** (%)
1. I use Singlish with my classmates during class discussions.	55	45
2. I use Singlish when I speak to my classmates during recess.	83	17
3. I use Singlish to get my ideas across clearly.	31	69
4. I feel comfortable when I speak to my friends in Singlish.	65	35
5. It is easier to communicate with my friends in Singlish.	71	29
6. My parents speak Singlish.	29	61
7. My brothers and sisters speak Singlish.	52	48
8. It is cool to speak Singlish.	17	83
9. My friends laugh at me when I speak good English.	5	95
10. I would like to learn to speak good English.	92	8

*Agree includes “Strongly Agree” and “Agree”.

**Disagree includes “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree”.

(Rubdy, 2007: 312, partly modified by the author)

The students’ consciousness of the existence of a domain separation in the use of Singlish and SSE becomes even clearer if one acknowledges their responses to the use of Standard English in specific situations as the ones exemplified on table 4. The results are an evidence of the students’ capability to successfully select the appropriate code in what Rubdy (2007: 316) calls “specific situational interaction”: Singlish for informal talk with friends or family and

SSE for educational, professional and formal contexts. This means that thanks to a proper education Singaporeans would be able to achieve proficiency in the standard variety and be capable of switching between Singlish and SSE; preserving both the linguistic identity marker and the socio-economic strength.

Table 4. Student reactions towards the use of Standard English

Statements	*Agree** (%)	*Disagree*** (%)
1. With your classmates during class discussions.	75	25
2. When speaking to your classmates during recess.	37	63
3. When speaking to your friends.	47	53
4. When speaking to your parents.	70	30
5. When speaking to your brothers and sisters.	42	58
6. When speaking to other Singaporeans outside your home and school.	65	35

*Agree includes "Strongly Agree" and "Agree".

**Disagree includes "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree".

(Rubdy, 2007: 316, partly modified by the author)

In the case of Leimgruber (2014), a number of 114 university students with a Chinese ethnic background participated in the survey which was conducted in 2011. In general, the statements focus on the English-Singlish interaction but there are some which allude to the Mandarin-dialects one too. Some of the statements paraphrase official government stances (S4, S5, S9, S11), others are claims commonly heard in public (S6, S7, S10) while the first three are more exploratory. Taking into consideration the results, it appears that Singaporeans do not agree with the government's stance towards Singlish: only 8% define it as bad English (S5) and a very low 3% consider it would be better if it did not exist (S9). Additionally, 54% even regard it as a Singaporean identity marker (S6). On the other hand, they do approve the government policies with 85% accounting English as the right language for education (S4) and 94% agreeing with the mother tongue policy (S11). Still, neither the SGEM nor the SMC's efficiency are very positively assessed (S1, S2). It is curious to note how whereas 53% are happy with the existence of the SMC (S3), 89% find the decreasing use of Chinese

dialects saddening (S11). Finally, Singlish is perceived as more of a multiracial unifier than English (S7, S8).

Table 5. Singaporeans' language attitudes

Statements	*Agree** (%)	*Neutral* (%)	*Disagree*** (%)
1. The Speak Good English Movement has changed the way in which I use English.	23	20	57
2. I think the Speak Mandarin Campaign has changed the way Singaporeans use Chinese.	44	20	36
3. I am happy about the existence of the Speak Mandarin Campaign.	53	41	6
4. It is a good thing that English is the main language for education in Singapore.	85	12	3
5. Singlish is just bad English.	8	15	77
6. Singlish is the only thing that really makes us Singaporeans.	54	18	28
7. Singlish unites the different races of Singapore.	88	8	4
8. English unites the different races of Singapore.	71	21	8
9. It would be better for Singapore if Singlish did not exist.	3	18	79
10. I find it sad that many Chinese dialects are no longer spoken.	89	7	4
11. It is important that pupils learn their mother tongue.	94	4	3

*Agree includes "Strongly Agree" and "Agree".

**Disagree includes "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree".

(Leimgruber, 2014: 53, partly modified by the author)

Once these attitudinal stances have been considered, one has an insight into what the linguistic issue means to young Singaporeans, both in the primary and university levels. This is genuinely important since they are the vast majority of users of the variety and thus denote what its future might be.

4. Political, Social and Linguistic Analysis of Singlish

As Fong, Lim and Wee (2002: 22) remark, the basis of the problem concerning Singlish lies in a number of assumptions about language that are not unique to Singapore but are globally shared: "(i) language should not change; (ii) the Standard is uniform and it is clear what the Standard is; (iii) the native speaker knows best; and (iv) language use is not domain sensitive".

Languages in contact, most often than not, lead to language variation which is the case with a very commonly known example: English. Even though such changes are unavoidable and arise naturally, they are usually not viewed as positive. Language admits variation, it is not enclosed and for this reason, the idealized image of the 'native speaker' needs to be erased. A mother tongue speaker of an English variety should never be considered as less proficient than a British English or American English one. Such idea is not only a complete nonsense, but it has a highly negative effect: there is a large amount of linguistically insecure speakers in global terms. A glaring example of this is the case of Singapore.

Turning to the matter in hand, the main concern about the status of Singlish is that the government takes a stand against the co-existence of the varieties. They consider that the increasing use of one of them means the decreasing use of the other which connotes a negative relationship. Despite of this, enough proof has been provided to confirm that such environment is not intended by Singlish speakers and advocates. Singlish should not be seen as a threat to English but as a counterpart. The existence of one does not need to be the jeopardizing of the other. Both, together with the other languages spoken in Singapore, should be regarded as a great potential: the incredible linguistic and cultural wealth of the country.

4.1. SWOT Analysis

SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and it is an analytical framework that evaluates such elements of an entity, in this case Singlish. Using this analysis one can specify the position of the Singaporean colloquial variety today and where it may be positioned in the future, determining the favourable factors as well as the obstacles that must be conquered.

The SWOT analysis serves as an assessment technique and as Grundy and Brown (2002) state, its origins remain obscure, but it has been used since the 1960s and some authors credit it to Albert Humphrey. Whereas it was originated for business and industry, it is a comprehensive and versatile tool that can be employed for analysing a great variety of subjects. It has been widely used in social and human sciences, yet there are also a number of linguistic studies where it has already been applied. For instance, Oduor (2010) decided to carry out a SWOT analysis of the language policies in education in Kenya and Ethiopia while De Knop and Meunier (2015) did so for analysing the use of both learner corpora and Cognitive Linguistics to research second language acquisition. This useful and versatile instrument is not as widespread in the field of linguistics as in other sectors, but it is indeed a quite practical alternative for research work.

Table 6. Singlish SWOT analysis

	HELPFUL	**HARMFUL**
INTERNAL	***Strengths***	***Weaknesses***
	1. Great number of speakers 2. Identity marker 3. System of rules 4. Group affinity 5. Metalinguistic awareness 6. Glocalization	1. Inequality of power in socio-political context 2. Unstandardized 3. Metalinguistic awareness 4. Globalization
EXTERNAL	***Opportunities***	***Threats***
	7. 'Save Our Singlish' Campaign 8. Phua Chu Kang 9. *The Straits Times'* non-opposition	5. The Government's position 6. 'Speak Good English' Movement 7. *The Straits Times'* non-support

At the internal level, one can remark that Singlish inherently entails different strengths and weaknesses. With regard to its strengths, six aspects are identified: the great number of speakers of Singlish; its power as an identity marker; the fact that it constitutes a system of rules; its capability to form group affinity; how achieving metalinguistic awareness pleads for the coexistence of Singlish and SSE; and that it signifies the phenomenon of glocalization. Despite there is no official record available of the number of Singlish speakers and users, it is widely known that the vast majority of Singaporeans use it daily; this being the variety's greatest strength. The growing status of Singlish is mainly derived from it being a uniquely Singaporean identity marker, feature that serves as a great unifying force conveying group affinity. Furthermore, as any other natural language, Singlish is a rule-governed system. Fong, Lim and Wee (2002: 32) reinforced such statement by showing evidence of how not all verbs allow reduplication in Singlish. For instance, it would be correct to say "The child kick-kick the ball" but not "*I know-know the answer" since the verbs that allow this pattern need to head activity verb phrases. Notwithstanding the above, Singaporeans need to attain a significant level of metalinguistic awareness in order to distinguish between Singlish and SSE. Once they are able to do so, which requires them to receive a good quality English education, they would, then, be able to decide which code to use, enabling the coexistence of both. Finally, the existence of the colloquial variety is the perfect example of glocalization, defined by the Encyclopaedia Britannica as the "interconnectedness of the global and local levels (…), [it] indicates that the growing importance of continental and global levels is occurring together with the increasing salience of local and regional levels" (Blatter, n.d.). Singlish constitutes the juxtaposition of national identity and internationalism, the two great competing forces in Singapore: a resolution revealing that embracing a global position does not need to lead to the loss of the local distinctiveness. In contrast, it should also be acknowledged how Singlish comprises a certain number of weaknesses at the internal level. First of all, being considered inferior in the socio-political context has a very negative influence on its status. Not only is it labelled as 'broken English' by many, but also treated as a poor form of communication. On top of that, even though Singlish is a system of rules, it should not be confused with a standard variety since its forms and structures are not recorded by an authoritative grammar, it is not formally instructed, and it does not have a body of literary texts, among other things. Another important consideration is how in the same way that metalinguistic awareness could denote strength, its absence would awaken the legitimacy of Singlish. This is because speakers not being able to use the colloquial and the standard variety separately as well as correctly would damage their linguistic competence. Such

occurrence would especially affect their proficiency in English, which is the principal argument of anti-Singlish advocates. One last point is the fact that, from a critical perspective, globalization encourages the disappearance of varieties such as Singlish in favour of imposing a global language (English). This is not to say that the practice and definition of globalization postulates nowadays the destruction of cultures, but that it results in the predominance of the Western culture, in this case being the British or American culture. It is thus essential to mark how this would be an example of global Westernization and not globalization per se or at least what globalization should truly entail.

At the external level, referring to the forces surrounding the evolution and development of Singlish, both opportunities as well as threats arise. Firstly, the greatest threat towards Singlish is the Government's position. As already mentioned, the Singaporean government takes a stance against the colloquial variety by considering it negative and discouraging its use. Such reasoning is based on the believe that it is ill-formed, signifying a lack of competence and that it has therefore a negative impact both in Singaporeans' ability to master their English skills as well as on the image the country gives to the world. This assumption is reflected on the government's 'Speak Good English Movement', which seems intent on eliminating Singlish. The aim of the movement is to encourage citizens to use English that is globally understood and envisions such ability to be bound to the Singaporean identity, extinguishing the identity marker that characterizes Singlish. Being classified as unprestigious it hinders its status and also gives a very misleading idea, which yet exerts considerable influence on the Singaporean population. One last point is how the country's leading newspaper, *The Strait Times*, in spite of its large number of publications regarding Singlish, does not take sides on the issue. A channel which reaches such a wide audience would have a great impact on this ongoing debate. However, their course of action does not come as a surprise; they cover the story showing arguments from both sides without attacking the government's position. Its non-support is a threat to Singlish in the same way that its non-opposition is an opportunity. By all means, reporting how "19 Singlish items [have been] added to the Oxford English Dictionary" (Kok, 2016) or that a "British Council director who teaches English hopes Singlish can flourish in S'pore together with English" (Davies, 2017) is certainly beneficial for the colloquial variety. Another topic from the media to bear in mind is the character of Phua Chu Kang, leading a comedy sitcom of the same name, that became an emblematic icon because he spoke Singlish and embodied the Singaporean everyman. Its existence roused the linguistic debate and it ended with the government ordering the TV show

to improve the character's English proficiency. Currently, the use of Singlish is banned from TV and radio, but Phua Chu Kang remains a symbol (Bokhorst-Heng, 2005). Finally, the 'Save Our Singlish Campaign' constitutes the greatest opportunity for Singlish to be viewed positively and not as the opponent of English. The campaign opens up the conversation, not merely accommodating to what the government concludes, and gives Singaporeans a chance to stand for their view. It also serves as a way to show what Singlish advocates really stand for and all the possibilities the variety offers.

In conclusion, the number of helpful factors, both strengths and opportunities, compensates the harmful ones, which is the reason why one can predict the survival of Singlish. Even more so if we consider how its use does not decrease despite the government's attempts to eliminate it. But even so, the threats and weaknesses linked to Singlish should not be minimized. Still, mainly all of them are based on the government's position and course of action which suggests that overcoming such obstacle, the status of Singlish could then be normalized.

Conclusion

It was the aim of this paper to provide an overview of the sociolinguistic situation in Singapore. The language policy of the country does not only give emphasis to the role English plays in Singapore and its economy but also on the mother tongues (Malay, Mandarin, Tamil) as traditional and national values carriers. It is not surprising, therefore, that Singlish came into being in such a characteristic condition of language contact. The use of English is influenced by world economic trends while the use of Singlish is determined by the need of an emblem of national identity and culture. Different approaches have attempted to explain the relationship between the two Singaporean varieties: SSE and Singlish. Platt and Weber (1980) analysed it in terms of a continuum depending on the speaker's proficiency, education and socio-economic status. Pakir (1991), however, did so by combining two clines: proficiency and formality. A more recent approach proposed by Gupta (1994) regarded it as one reflecting a diglossic situation. And finally, Alsagoff (2007) proposed that the variation is based on a negotiation between the two opposing macro-cultural orientations: the globalist and the localist one. The bottom line is that there are two stances regarding the existence and use of Singlish. On one side, pro-Singlish advocates acknowledge the variety as an identity marker and defend the speakers' ability to co-switch between the two varieties; not negatively

affecting the standard variety. On the other side, anti-Singlish advocates claim that the colloquial variety is an impediment in the acquisition of 'good English', threatening the national economy. These different attitudes towards Singlish are based on different needs and purposes, which are portrayed in the 'Speak Good English Movement' (pleading for the abolition of Singlish) and the 'Save Our Singlish Campaign' (celebrating Singlish worth and uniqueness). In order to understand the stance of those involved in this matter, they need to be given the chance to present their views. Namely, the survey conducted by Rubdy (2007) proves how Singaporeans are aware of a domain separation in the use of Singlish and SSE while the one by Leimgruber (2014) reveals that Singaporeans do not agree with the government's stance towards Singlish and its depiction as negative. Singlish inherently entails different strengths and weaknesses, just like it is affected by both opportunities and threats alike. Ultimately, no matter how many factors are against its existence, Singlish continues to be valuable and significant for its users, the people of Singapore.

The fact that proficiency in Standard English is essential for Singapore and its citizens is beyond question. One can easily assume therefore that the teaching of English should and will continue to be encouraged by the government in the future. It is a basic right for every Singaporean to receive a good education, thus having the same opportunities for achieving proficiency in Standard English. Nonetheless, as this paper has discussed, Singlish should not simply be labelled as damaging and the attempts to banish it from Singapore should cease as to normalize the situation. Not only should it be tolerated but seen as a beneficial and rich resource. The ability to code-switch between Singlish and SSE needs to be a topic of interest since it is a great way to exploit the speakers' language abilities, while also meeting their different needs. This is the way to ensure a true co-existence of not only the two varieties but also of the macro-cultural perspectives and identities of Singapore's citizens. There are different visions of what it means to be Singaporean and all of them need to be addressed, respected and represented. This study has provided sufficient and convincing evidence to support the claim that it is roughly impossible to eradicate Singlish. Singlish is not simply a language variety, but a remarkable carrier of culture, a resource for expressing socio-cultural meanings and identities. It is an instrument for the formation of identity, not only a tool for communication. One should never ignore the fact that all languages and language varieties embody their own culture. Singapore's colloquial variety gives its users the opportunity to use language effectively across different social and ethnic groups, it is structurally inclusive. Language diversity is a treasure that is worth protecting. The idea that language should not

change or evolve should never be encouraged. Likewise, it is important to see language in culture and not to neglect the relevance of gaining cultural communicative competence. For the purpose of building linguistic confidence, linguistic prejudices and discrimination would need to be dissipated.

In closing, it ought to be noted that the development of this work leaves the door open for future research on the potential of the coexistence of SSE and Singlish. For instance, it would be interesting to see whether Singlish could be used in schools as a tool to facilitate the teaching of the standard. Conversely, it would be notably relevant to establish a coherent comparison of Singaporeans with a quality education that have therefore master their proficiency in English, and those who lack education or have received a poor one; and then see whether they are able to successfully co-switch between the varieties. Despite one could already predict the results, an actual case study would provide the necessary evidence to prove that the Singaporean government should not worry as much about their people speaking Singlish, but about them lacking the opportunity for appropriate education.

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